the UK on the importance of relations with India. A Biilateral Investment Protection Agreement was concluded with the UK during the visit, the first signed by India with any country, giving a further boost to economic relations and investments.

Prime Minister met his British counterpart Mr. John Major again in New York during the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session in October 1995 during which he discussed bilateral, regional and international matters of mutual interest.

External Affaris Minister met the then British Foreign Secretary in May 1995, during his visit to the UK for the VE Day Commemorative Events. He met his current counterpart, Mr. Malcolm Rifkind at the UNGA Session in New York in September 1995 and once again in November 1995 when he paid an offical visit to the UK. External Affairs Minister also met the British Ministers of Defence and Home Affaris. In addition, he met leaders of the opposition parties. In all his meetings, External Affairs Minister was able to discuss bilateral issues and ways and means of further strengthening Indo-UK bilateral ties. He was also able to convey to the British leadership India's views on matters of vital concern to us.

Over the past two years, a number of British Ministers representing their specific areas ′ of responsibility have visited India and held meetings with their counterparts and other dignitaries in India. Similarly, a number of Ministers from India representing sectors such as Finance, Home Affairs, Surface Transport, Environment and Forests, Power, Civil Aviation & Tourism, Human Resources Development also visited the UK and held meetings with their British Counterparts.

At the official level, eight rounds of Foreign Secretary level talks have been held so far, the most recent of which was in September 1995 during the visit of the British Permanent Under Secretary of State to India.

India and UK have also established a Defence Consultative Group with the objective of strengthening bilateral cooperation in the defence field. The first meeting of the Group took place in May 1995 in London.

Regular exchanges of views will continue with the UK at various levels.

Inviting International Bids to Survey the Hydro-Carbon Reserves

1596. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the process of inviting international bids for speculative survey round for 20 blocks of proven Hydro carbon reserves has been delayed and final bid dates extended further;

(b) whether Government have failed 'to provide bidders with relevant data/ information and data on local/regional geology as assured in the bid invitation; and

(c) whether Government are confident to provide the docket containing relevant data to prospective bidders by the extended date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (CAPTAIN SATISH SHARMA): (a) to (c) The last date for submission of bids for the Joint Venture speculative survey round has been extended to 15th December, 1995 at the request of the prospective bidders to enable them to study the relevant data/ information. The basin dockets containing relevant data are being provided to bidders for inspection well before the close bidding.